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CIA recruiters pull a coup at Stanford

By Kathy Holub
Staff Writer

The man in the gray suit saw a likely target and leaped.

"Hi, there. Are you interested in something special?" he asked, with the air of someone selling expensive jewelry.

"Uh, no," the student mumbled. "I'm a political science major, and I'll be interviewing with you tomorrow."

"Ah," said the recruiter, gratified. "Then you'd be interested in overseas assignments."

As he led the young man away, his co-recruiters from the Central Intelligence Agency were welcoming dozens more Stanford University students on Wednesday to the agency's biggest, most expensive campus recruiting blitz in recent memory.

It worked better than anyone at the CIA had dreamed.

By the end of the day, at least 150 students had dropped by the Tresidder Student Union on campus for hot coffee, fresh doughnuts, free CIA pens and so-called "major briefings" from CIA division chiefs.

Even better, from the CIA's point of view, were the 80 students — including the sought-after majors in engineering and computer science — who signed up for interviews to be held today.

"They're not throwing rocks at us anymore," exulted Bob Magee, CIA director of personnel.

Far from it. The CIA is having a banner year on college campuses, and Stanford is no exception.

Bill Cooley, the CIA's recruitment officer in San Francisco, said he now receives 100 to 200 applications a year from

Stanford students — about 50 percent more than in the mid-1970s. Student interest is also rising at the University of California at Berkeley and other local colleges, he said.

He doesn't pretend to know why things have changed so dramatically since the late 1960s, when Stanford student demonstrators physically blocked their classmates from meeting with CIA recruiters.

"There's a certain amount of curiosity now," he said. "Most people don't understand the agency that well. Beyond that, a lot of people are interested in jobs."

About 15 hardy demonstrators did show up on Wednesday to protest the CIA's involvement in Nicaragua, but they could not have been more polite. When Magee made it clear he wouldn't field their questions from the podium — "I'm not going to get into a debate on policy because it's really not my bag," he told them — they made a short statement and left.

Those who stayed, heard that the CIA is looking for a few good people. They heard that "spies are not glamorous — they're people just like you and me." They heard that the CIA won't make them famous or rich — starting salaries range from \$19,000 to \$25,000.

They heard that a CIA career is "exciting and filled with diversity."

They also heard the term "best and brightest" mentioned at least a dozen times.

The CIA, currently facing a period of growth as its first generation of recruits reaches retirement age, needs more people than ever, officials say.

Stanford is a prime hunting ground because of the caliber of its graduates, they said. "If this were Podunk U., we wouldn't be here," said Morgan Jones, Western Division recruitment chief.

The visit to Stanford was pre-

ceded by three full-page ads in the campus newspaper, a mass mailing to about 1,000 Stanford students, a plastering of posters all over campus and two days of radio spots on the campus station. The advertising cost about \$5,000, according to one estimate.

For the briefings and interviews themselves, 10 CIA officials flew out from Washington — an expensive and nearly unprecedented recruiting blitz. In recent memory, such a strategy has only been used once before, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in October. That session drew a much smaller audience of 100 students, of which about 35 signed up for interviews.

CIA officials said they will wait to see how many actual hires they glean from the two sessions before they spend more money.

Stanford senior Paul Toback, a political science major, said he had attended the briefing out of curiosity and found it "boring" and "simplistic."

Not Myron Smith, a sophomore majoring in applied math. "I'm interested in covert operations because I like to be in places I'm not supposed to," he said.

"I've always been a person who likes to defeat systems, like burglar alarms. Being in the CIA would almost be like being a criminal — legally."